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MEN NOT WANTED

A ONE-ACT COMEDY

By
BELL ELLIOTT PALMER

Author of
"Christmas Truants"

CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
Publishers

MEN NOT WANTED

FOR EIGHT WOMEN

CHARACTERS

(In order of their first appearance)

MARGARET BRANSON, LAURA FITZSIMMONS ... *Guests at the Kellogg house party*

MRS. RICHARD D. KELLOGG ... *The hostess*

HELEN STODDARD, EMMA SUMMERS ... *Other guests*

MARY CASTLE ... *The Kelloggs' maid, convinced of masculine tyranny*

FRANCES AYRES ... *The frivolous guest*

GRACE KELLOGG ... *Mrs. Kellogg's daughter*

TIME—*Any summer.*

PLACE—*Mrs. Kellogg's summer home.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About thirty minutes.*

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COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Margaret, Laura, Helen, Emma, and Grace, aged from seventeen to twenty, are all attractive, light-hearted girls who, under the spell of a social service lecture have suddenly assumed a profound seriousness which shows in their dress and manner.

Margaret allows her hair to fly untended, and wears an untidy-looking negligee.

Laura appears in a neat but plain dress, with old, loose-heeled slippers on her feet.

Helen wears a rather plain dark gingham house dress.

Emma wears a light, pretty summer frock and hat, both a little wilted from heat and strenuous activity.

Grace wears a severe-looking tailored suit in keeping with her rôle of woman politician.

Mrs. Kellogg wears fashionable street suit and hat.

Mary is an angular, sad-looking maid, long past middle age. She wears the regulation maid's costume of grey or black with white cap and apron.

Frances, whose gay spirit is not affected by the lecture, is dressed in a modish and becoming white sports suit and hat, with appropriate accessories.

PROPERTIES

For Mrs. Kellogg, hand bag, samples of dress silks, open letter. For Helen, two pencils, two large volumes of "Plutarch's Lives." For Emma, armful of tracts, handkerchief. For Mary, dust cloth, several vases filled with flowers. For Frances, tennis racket, bunch of flowers, engagement ring, handkerchief. For Grace, pamphlet, paper knife.

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MEN NOT WANTED

SCENE: *The comfortably furnished living room of* MRS. KELLOGG'S *summer home. It has two doors: one at right leading to the front hall and outdoors, and the other at left, leading to the rear of the house. A large window, with curtains and drapes, is up center. Up left is a bookcase, on which* MARGARET'S *black hat is lying. A lounge, piled with fancy pillows, is down right. Near the center of the stage is a library table, with an easy chair at right and another at left of it. On the table are books, papers, and a vase containing flowers and water. Down left is a writing desk on which is a complete set of writing paraphernalia, also a thick pamphlet. A straight-backed chair is beside it. Up right near the back drop is a fireplace with a mantel, on which are a number of pictures and ornaments. Above the mantel is a mirror. Up center near the back drop are two comfortable-looking chairs, one on either side of the window. A foot-stool is down center right not far from the right-hand arm-chair. A small telephone table, with an instrument on it and a chair beside it, is at left between the writing desk and the door. In the drawer of the center table is a complete set of writing materials and a letter in an open envelope.*

At rise of curtain, MARGARET *is sitting at the telephone table at left, talking into the mouthpiece. Her hair is in disorder, and her negligee is untidy.*

MARGARET (*rumpling her hair nervously as she phones*). Why, you see, Mrs. Barnes, I thought that since you had known mother so long and had had so much experience in church work, you might be able to advise me. (*Pauses and listens.*) Yes. As I was saying, I heard a perfectly wonder-ful lecture last night on "What Is Worth While in Life,"

and it made me feel how frivolous I have been to neglect the serious part of life. (*Pauses.*) Oh, did you hear it, too? Over the radio? Wasn't it perfectly won-der-ful? It made me positively shudder to think how much time I have wasted dressing and fixing my hair and going to parties. What's that? (*Pauses.*) Oh, yes; I believe that Mrs. Kellogg is planning some parties while we are here, but I don't expect to give much of my time to them. (*Pauses.*) Well, of course I like Dick well enough, but since last night I've decided I've been wasting too much time trying to please men. Now I ask you, Mrs. Barnes, are they worth it? (*Soulfully.*) Think of all the splendid things in the world that are much more worth while! (*Pauses.*) Yes; I have fully decided that I'm going to be a missionary. (*Pauses.*) Oh, yes, indeed. I feel that my own particular field is Africa. I'm going there just as soon as I can find out about the work. (*Pauses.*) Yes. I really called you to find out the address of that Kushutoo missionary you were telling mother about last summer. He can tell me all about the work. I bet he'd like to have me as his assistant. (*Pauses.*) Just wait a minute. I'll write it down. (*Drops receiver, makes a comedy dash down to writing desk, grabs paper and pencil, darts back to phone, puts receiver to ear, and writes.*) Just say that again, Mrs. Barnes. (*Pauses and writes.*) Oh, thank you so much! I'll call you again sometime.

During her last two sentences, LAURA *enters at left, walking clumsily in loose-heeled boudoir slippers, looking preoccupied.* MARGARET *looks her over critically.*

MARGARET. Hullo, Laura. Where did you dig up the fancy slippers? At a rummage sale? How come a fluffy ruffles like you looks so tacky to-day?

LAURA (*contemptuously*). Looks? Who cares for looks after that perfectly grand lecture we heard last night? It's a darned shame mother ever let me go into society and play around with the men. Think how useful I could have been to the world! (*Looks* MARGARET *over for the first time.*) Well, you're a fine one to make bum jokes about my slip-

pers. You look like the tail end of an imperfect day yourself! What have you done to your hair?

MARGARET (*tossing her head indifferently*). I should worry about my hair. I'm not going to be a silly butterfly a minute longer and spend all my time dressing to please the men. I don't mind telling you, Laura, that I'm done with men forever! (*Makes a sweeping gesture indicating complete elimination.*)

LAURA (*admiringly*). Oh, Margaret, isn't that simply splendid? I've ditched the men, too—they bore me, anyway. But I don't think I can quite afford to neglect my looks and get old and frowsy-looking. (*Glances cautiously into the mirror above the mantel and fusses with her hair.*)

MARGARET. Well, I intend to devote the rest of my life to foreign missions.

LAURA (*enthusiastically*). Oh, do you? I'm going to be a missionary, too.

MARGARET. From now on, I am going to cut out all frivolity and devote my life to uplifting the poor, benighted heathen of Africa—

LAURA (*in a disappointed tone*). But I have chosen Africa for my own field.

MARGARET (*contemptuously*). You! What could you do in Africa? Besides, I thought of it first. And there wouldn't be a bit of fun or a particle of glory for me, with another woman tagging along.

LAURA (*after a short silence*). Isn't Africa big enough so that you could take one end and I the other? It looks big enough on the map.

MARGARET. Well, I can tell you right away that Africa isn't big enough to hold two women missionaries. I intend to send back reports that will make me famous, like Stanley's "Darkest Africa," and if you were anywhere around, you'd cramp my style. I thought you were always so interested in tenement house babies. Why don't you stick to that line?

LAURA (*weakening*). Well, maybe I shall. To tell the truth, I'm not a bit keen about boa constrictors; and I un-

derstand that Africa is full of 'em. I'd simply pass away if I saw one swinging above my head.

MARGARET (*boastfully*). Pooh! I wouldn't care. I was reading the other day that the boa constrictor's deadliest enemy is a black bird with fringed feathers, which swoops down and picks out his eyes. My black lace hat with its ruffled edge—you remember I picked it up at a fire sale—looks exactly like the picture of that bird. (*Rises, crosses to the bookcase up left, gets the hat, and jams it down on her hair, with grotesque effect.*) There! I bet you that when Mr. Boa Constrictor sees this hat bobbing around the jungle he'll run a mile in the other direction. You know, boa constrictors are awfully dumb.

LAURA (*eying the hat with abhorrence*). I wouldn't say they were so dumb just because they ran from that! (*Points to the hat and shudders.*) I'd run from it, too, if I had to look at it very long. Take it off!

MARGARET (*scornfully, perching on the arm of chair at right of table*). Huh! 'Fraid cat! Why, you couldn't even be trusted to take care of slum babies. When they had the colic, you'd probably throw a fit and run away and leave them to scream their poor little heads off.

LAURA (*hotly*). I would not! I'm simply a wow at taking care of babies! I have a natural gift for it. What's more, I've got a perfectly gorgeous idea for inventing a cure for colic; and when I get it worked out, it'll make me a lot more famous than your little old missionary stunt will make you. So you can just keep your old Africa. I don't want it! (*The two girls glare at each other. Suddenly the doorbell rings off right.* MARGARET *jerks off her hat wildly, flings it back on the bookcase, smooths her disordered hair frantically, runs down to the writing desk, and begins to write.* LAURA *flings herself on the lounge and piles sofa pillows upon her feet until the shabby slippers are hidden. Both wait breathlessly. When no one enters, they exchange shame-faced looks. Then* LAURA *speaks contemptuously.*) So you're the gal that doesn't care a hoot about her looks! But the minute the bell rings— Quick, Hortense! Do my

hair and bring my handsomest gown! It may be a man! (*Laughs teasingly.*)

MARGARET (*indignantly*). What! Me dress up for a man? Well, I guess not! I merely took off my hat to ventilate my hair. I don't want to grow bald-headed from wearing a hat too much in the house.

LAURA (*with a disparaging look at* MARGARET'S *head*). Your hair couldn't possibly look any worse than it does now, if you were bald-headed.

MARGARET (*sarcastically*). Thanks, darling. Anyone would think, from the way you're hiding those sloppy, down-at-the-heel old slippers, that you were afraid a man might pop into the room at any minute.

LAURA (*tossing the pillows off her feet and jumping up, haughtily*). How many times must I tell you that I'm off of men for good? These slippers are the badge of my emancipation from frivolity. (*Makes a sweeping gesture of the arms and flings out one leg in a kind of pirouette, thereby losing a slipper. Bends down and makes a dive for the slipper.*) Henceforth I live only to serve humanity. (*Tries to put slipper on, loses her balance, and sits flat on the floor.* MARGARET *snickers.*)

Enter MRS. KELLOGG *at right, dressed for the street. She carries a hand bag containing dress samples.* LAURA *drags on her slipper, springs to her feet in confusion, and sits demurely on the lounge.*

MRS. KELLOGG (*glancing in surprise from one girl to the other*). Why, girls, what are you doing, moping around the house on a glorious morning like this? I thought you had decided to go shopping with me. The samples have come from Menard's, and I know you'll be anxious to see them. (*Sits at center table, takes samples from her hand bag, and shows them to the girls, speaking enthusiastically.*) There! Did you ever see anything as lovely and girlish as these little prints? Here's just the thing for you, Margaret.

MARGARET (*indifferently*). It is pretty. But I don't really need any new dresses just now.

MRS. KELLOGG. Why, I thought you said yesterday that you had to have a new one for the Fairs' dance.

MARGARET (*embarrassed*). Yes, I know. But I've changed my mind. I may never dance—er—I mean, if I need a new one—I—er—can make the old ones do.

MRS. KELLOGG (*puzzled*). Well, of course you have all sorts of pretty dresses. (*Turns to* LAURA.) Surely you're going to get a new one, Laura, in honor of Ted Jannin. Just look at this wild rose pattern. Pink is his favorite color; isn't it?

LAURA (*evasively*). I don't know—that is, I suppose so. But I don't really think I shall need any more dainty, frilly things any more.

MRS. KELLOGG (*rising and gathering up her bag and samples*). Well, of course, that is for you to decide. I will leave the samples here (*puts them on the table*), and you can look them over at your leisure. If you change your minds, I shall be glad to order the goods sent out or go down town with you. (*Exit hurriedly at right.*)

MARGARET (*with elbow on desk and chin cupped in her hand, speaks, somewhat dismayed*). Well, here we are in a pretty mess! We've talked so much about the new dresses we intended to have. And we've even engaged the dressmaker!

LAURA (*stern and businesslike*). Easiest thing in the world to tell her we've changed our minds. After all, what use would you have for silks and voiles running around the African jungle and dodging snakes and alligators? And I'd look funny, wouldn't I, fluttering up and down tenement house stairs and washing slum babies in that wild rose print?

Enter HELEN *at left, with a pencil stuck behind each ear and carrying two large books. She sits at left of center table, and lays books on the table beside her.*

MARGARET (*glancing at the titles*). Good grief, Helen! What are you doing lugging Plutarch's "Lives" around? Can't you find any lighter literature than this to read and give yourself a headache?

HELEN (*shaking her head dolefully*). I can't get that lecture of last evening out of my head. I was never so deeply impressed in all my life.

LAURA. Me, too!

MARGARET. Wasn't it thrilling?

HELEN. Girls, it just makes me sick to think how I've wasted my time with dress and parties and men. Men are the worst! And now I'm through with 'em. I swear it! I've canceled two dates to go sailing.

MARGARET (*somewhat regretfully*). And I've given up the loveliest motor ride and an evening at the theater just to —to go to Africa.

LAURA (*almost crying*). I'm sure I don't know what Ted Jannin will think when he gets my note this afternoon. We were going walking along the beach drive. But I'd do anything for the tenement house babies!

HELEN (*firmly*). I've turned over an entirely new leaf. I've laid out a course in serious reading for myself. I thought it might help me find out my mission in life. I'm beginning with Plutarch.

MARGARET (*giggling*). Having put men behind you, you are now studying the mistakes of great men.

HELEN. Don't be so flippant, Margaret. Good books are really elevating. Besides, this is awfully interesting. (*Opens one of the volumes and yawns.*) If you will excuse me, I'll go on with my reading. Or would you like me to read aloud?

MARGARET (*hastily*). It's sweet of you to offer, but really I have to write a letter at once to the superintendent of the Central African Mission. (*Turns around to the desk and begins to write.*)

LAURA (*springing up from the lounge and sitting at right of center table*). And I must write to that social settlement worker—what's her name?—Miss Montremy, at once and tell her. I'm going to join her staff. (*Opens drawer of library table, takes out writing materials and an opened letter, and begins to write.*) I'll begin work to-morrow.

Enter EMMA *at right, carrying an armful of tracts.*

HELEN (*looking up from her book with a yawn*). Why, Emma, where have you been? Come to think of it, I haven't seen you since breakfast.

EMMA (*sitting on lounge, drops her tracts on the lounge beside her and wipes her forehead with her handkerchief*). I've been terribly busy. I started out right after breakfast, and I've been delivering tracts.

MARGARET (*blankly*). Tracts!

LAURA (*her mouth open*). Wha—what for?

EMMA. Well, you see, I was so thrilled by that lecture last night that I couldn't get it out of my head. It showed me so plainly that I have been wasting my time, particularly with men, that I—well, I canceled my game of tennis with Edward Short— Oh, girls, he is simply a divine player! That is, I mean— I'm through with men. I'm going to devote myself to the service of mankind.

MARGARET (*coldly*). How interesting!

HELEN (*skeptically*). No! You don't say!

LAURA (*sotto voce, with indignation*). Copy cat!

EMMA (*too well pleased with herself to detect the note of criticism*). Mrs. Harcourt has often begged me to help her distribute tracts among the fishermen. So I went right around to her and got a bundle.

MARGARET (*enviously*). You're lucky to get into active service so soon. Oh, dear! I wish it didn't take so long to get to Africa.

LAURA. And to think how many slum babies may be dying this minute from ill treatment and lack of helpers! I've a notion to start out at once and walk to the city.

EMMA (*doubtfully, as she arranges the tracts in systematic piles on the lounge*). Well, I'm not so sure that I did any more good by passing out these goofy tracts than if I had stayed at home and played tennis.

MARGARET (*amazed*). What!

LAURA. Why, Emma!

EMMA. Not one of the fishermen looked as if he could read. One of 'em wrapped his bait in his tract, before my very eyes. And another was so drunk that I got scared and

came away. However, I intend to stick. I might as well. Ed will probably never speak to me again! Maybe I'll take up Grace Kellogg's work.

LAURA. What's Grace going to do?

MARGARET. Where is she?

EMMA. Upstairs writing letters to the presidents of a lot of women voters' clubs. Ever since the lecture of last night, she's been all wrought up and awfully down on the men. She doesn't dare to tell her mother what she's up to, but (*leaning toward the others confidentially*) between you and me and the gatepost, she really intends to get a job lecturing for the women voters' clubs on the civic duties of women.

HELEN (*gasping*). My goodness!

MARGARET. Splendid!

Enter MARY, *the maid, at left, carrying a dust cloth and several cases, which she places on mantel during ensuing speeches.*

MARY (*glancing around the room at the girls*). Will I be after disturbin' you ladies if I do a little dustin'? Seemed like I could niver get around to it this mornin' till now.

HELEN (*pleasantly*). Go as far as you like, Mary. If we get in your way, just shoo us aside. (*Resumes her reading, with a prolonged yawn.*)

LAURA (*looking up from her writing as* MARY *approaches the table*). Mary, did you ever fool around much with the men?

MARY (*dusting the books*). I did that. Why, bless your sweet life! I was married three times!

MARGARET (*dropping her pen in astonishment*). You don't say! Why, how did you ever happen to catch—? I mean, how did they ever persuade you to marry them?

MARY (*dusting a vase thoughtfully*). Well, you see, I was young and silly once.

HELEN (*sotto voce, to* LAURA). Would you ever have believed it?

MARY. And when they asked me, I felt sort of sorry for

them and said, "yes." But I would never do it again if I had my life to live over.

EMMA (*triumphantly, to the other girls*). Ah, you hear that? Just what we've been saying: Men are only a hindrance! Mary ought to know; she's had enough experience! (*Hunts behind the pictures on the mantel for string, finds it, and begins to tie up tracts with it.*)

LAURA (*rising and wandering restlessly about the room*). But is a man really worse than a bunch of colicky babies?

MARY (*dusting chairs up center*). Worse? Well, I should say so. Why, I've took care of slathers of babies in my time and come through with only tired arms. But onct a woman gets married, it's tired arms, tired jaws, and a tired heart she carries to bed with her every night, for all the arguing she's had to do to get enough to feed and clothe herself.

MARGARET (*nodding, with conviction*). That's true. And the world not a bit better off for her trouble, either!

(*The other girls nod vigorously in approval.*)

Enter FRANCES *gayly at right, carrying a tennis racket in one hand and a bouquet of flowers in the other. She throws herself on the lounge, puts the racket on the floor beside her, and glances in astonishment from one girl to another.*

FRANCES (*frivolously*). Greetings, sisters! What have I interrupted? A meeting of Doleful Dumps Lodge, Number 22? You all look as though you are carrying the sins of the world on your shoulders.

LAURA (*sternly*). Frances, don't be flippant!

MARGARET (*ditto*). Somebody ought to help the sinners bear their burdens!

EMMA. That's right! Kid us when we are trying to do some good in the world!

FRANCES (*taking off her hat, unruffled, and fanning herself with it, as she glances amusedly at the four girls*). Oh, so that's what you're trying to do! Since when have you acquired this zeal to serve suffering humanity?

MARGARET (*scathingly*). Since the lecture last night. If you hadn't played hookey instead of attending it with us, you'd understand why we were all so deeply impressed—

FRANCES (*with a giggle*). I'll say you were!

MARGARET (*continuing*). —impressed with the fact that the world needs us badly! (*Consults a booklet on the desk.*) Do you realize that out of two million African souls, packed in an area no larger than that of any one of our larger cities—?

FRANCES (*interrupting, in surprise*). You don't say! How did the Africans happen to get packed in that closely? I've always heard that one of the greatest difficulties a missionary in Africa has to encounter is the long distances he must travel in getting from village to village.

MARGARET (*confused, turning several pages*). Oh, yes. I got that mixed. That was an article on China that I was reading. But here it is. (*Reads.*) "Only a small portion of the poor souls hungering for knowledge are able to be reached, on account of the slow and tedious journeys which must be made among the scattered settlements; also lack of interpreters and a pressing need of Bibles."

EMMA. Isn't that simply heart-rending? I believe I ought to give up tract work, Margaret, and go with you to Africa to distribute Bibles.

MARGARET (*hurriedly*). Oh, no. I can do it alone, all right. Once I get started, it won't take me long.

FRANCES (*enjoying herself*). Let your motto be, "A Bible in every heathen home in Africa."

(MARGARET *glares haughtily at her.*)

LAURA (*who has been reading an open letter which she has taken from the table drawer, comes down to footstool and sits*). Listen to this, girls. Here's something from Miss Montremy's last letter. (*Reads.*) "The mortality among infants has undoubtedly decreased during the past ten years. But each day sees a score or more of little lives blotted out for lack of a sufficient number of willing and skillful hands."

EMMA (*mournfully*). But that is nothing in comparison

with my poor fishermen. Just think, girls! Each time the fisherman goes out in his little sailboat may be his last! And he may drown without having read—even—one—of my—my tracts! (*Sobs into her handkerchief.*)

FRANCES (*hiding a smile*). Well, unfortunately I missed the lecture last night, so I'm not as deeply impressed with the world's pressing needs as you girls are. But if there's anything I can do to help you and yours, just let me know, and I'll be right there.

LAURA (*severely*). There isn't a particle of use trying to make anything worth while out of your life as long as you spend half your time trying to please the other sex.

FRANCES (*apologetically*). Yes; that is just what I came in to talk about. It's silly trying to live up to the expectations of a lot of masculine creatures. Half of them don't know what they want, anyhow. So I have decided to give up the society of men.

HELEN, MARGARET, *and* LAURA (*in concert*). Good for you!

FRANCES. And to tell you how happy I've been this morning, I've just played the first game of my life with—

MARGARET (*reprovingly*). And just think of the poor Africans who were needing Bibles; and the tenement babies dying like flies; and the awful risk the poor fishermen were running at the very moment when you were playing games for your own selfish pleasure!

FRANCES (*with a shudder*). I know; it's awful. But you see, since I didn't hear the lecture, the visions of all those calamities aren't as vivid in my mind as they are in yours. (*Turning to* LAURA.) By the way, Laura, what on earth have you said or done to Ted Jannin? I never knew him to act that way before.

LAURA. What way?

FRANCES. Oh, so strange and mopey. He never mentioned your name once, and you know he usually talks about you by the hour whenever I'll listen. And he went home right after the second game without saying a word.

LAURA. I'm not interested in Ted. Listen to this. (*She*

crosses and perches herself on the arm of FRANCES' *chair and reads from her letter in a dismal voice.*) "Statistics show that out of the two hundred and ninety-six deaths among infants, reported by health officers, thirty-six were caused by starvation, eighty-two by fever contracted—"

FRANCES (*jumping up and clapping her hands over her ears*). Oh, dear! I shall certainly go dippy if you read me any more of those woozy statistics. If there isn't anything I can really do for you, I think I shall go out and get a breath of sunshine before the world looks as dark as the poor African's fate!

MARGARET (*bristling*). Well, I—

FRANCES. I beg your pardon, Margaret. I mean as dark as it has been in the past—not after you get over there to brighten him up. (*Moves toward door, pauses as she passes* LAURA.) Oh, I forgot to say, Laura, that about an hour after the game I met Ted walking toward the park with that pretty little Hotchkins girl. I suppose he had to console himself for your absence.

LAURA (*starting visibly*). You don't mean that Teddy was poking around with that silly little baby doll? (*With growing irritation.*) He needn't think I'll ever step out with him again if he takes her on!

FRANCES (*pretending surprise*). Why, I didn't suppose it mattered to you in the least, Laura, what girls he takes out, now that you have thrown yourself so whole heartedly into the cause of the tenement babies.

LAURA (*growing calm and speaking with dignity*). You are right. If that poor, silly Hotchkins girl cannot realize how demoralizing the society of men is, when anything really noble and worth while is to be accomplished in the great universe, she is only to be pitied. (*With emphasis.*) I am thankful, at least, that I have realized it before it is too late.

Enter GRACE *hurriedly at left, carrying a pamphlet and a paper knife. Without apology, she bumps into* MARY, *who is just going out at left. As she advances to center, she*

stumbles against chairs, all the while stabbing the pamphlet with the paper knife to accentuate her feelings.

GRACE. Girls, girls, girls! What do you think of this? I have spent the entire morning looking up references, and I find that ninety-seven per cent. of the political offices in this country—or is it seventy-nine?—I forget which—well, anyway, they're held by men! Did you ever hear of anything so perfectly hoggish? They just grab the earth! Won't even let a poor woman be dog-catcher now and then! And that's the reward we get for being nice to 'em! (*Thumps the table with her fist.*) From this day, as long as I live, I am resolved not only to renounce the name of man, but to set my strength, my tongue, my all against the unjust tyranny which the American woman has borne so nobly for so long in silence. I'll teach the women how to use their civic rights!

FRANCES (*waving her handkerchief in mock enthusiasm*). Whoopee! Let the eagle scream!

LAURA, MARGARET, EMMA, *and* HELEN (*rushing over to* GRACE *and speaking in confused chorus, as they pat her on the back*). That's the talk! You've got the right idea. You'll be a whiz as a lecturer, Grace.

Enter MRS. KELLOGG *at right, with an open letter in her hand.*

MRS. KELLOGG (*smiling cheerily about her*). Well, girls, here is a problem. I just received this letter from Mrs. Winslow a moment ago—as I came in, from a special messenger. But you must help me decide. Listen. (*Reads.*) "Dearest Kate: One of my guests has failed me for the tea which I am giving this evening for our new minister—and at the eleventh hour! Do take pity on me and send me in all possible haste one of the sweet rosebuds from your house party. I never could decide, when standing before a florist window, which was my favorite flower. I leave this weighty matter to you. Only send me some one to go out to supper with Bobby—"

MARGARET (*jumping up excitedly from table*). Bobby! Not Bobby Winslow?

MRS. KELLOGG (*nodding and smiling*). The same dear, handsome old Bobby. He came home yesterday, a month before his mother expected him.

(*Instantly all the girls but* FRANCES *are on the alert, eager with anticipation.*)

LAURA (*rushing to desk and hurriedly collecting her letters*). Well, I've written and read letters to-day until my head aches. A change will do me good. I'll run right upstairs and write Mrs. Winslow my acceptance (*looks around at the other girls*), as I know none of you girls can spare the time.

MARGARET (*with feeling*). Time! I don't know what time you have, with statistics showing the babies dying off so rapidly every hour. It's different with me. I shall have to wait a long time, anyway, to hear from the Central African Mission. I'll tell Mrs. Winslow how sorry you all are that you can't come—

HELEN (*hurriedly shoving her books under the lounge*). Pooh! I can't see an earthly thing in the Plutarch I've read to-day to help me choose a career. Sometimes you get an inspiration where you least expect it. If I went to Mrs. Winslow's, I might get a suggestion from the minister. I'll do it!

EMMA (*springing forward eagerly*). Look here, girls; all of you have much too serious missions for you to consider for a moment anything so frivolous as going to a tea! I'm the one to go. It won't hurt those benighted fishermen to go without their tracts twenty-four hours longer, seeing that they've got along without them this long.

FRANCES (*in a gentle voice*). I don't want to seem selfish, but since you've accused me of being the only one without a great mission in life, it seems reasonable that I should be the one to go.

GRACE (*suddenly facing* FRANCES). What right have you to go, when you haven't given a moment's thought to the

worth while in life? In order to resist the tyranny of men, one must study them on every possible occasion, however painful. I'd hate awfully to seem rude to my guests, but really I feel that it is my duty to go to Mrs. Winslow's myself.

FRANCES (*smiling*). You asked me what right I have to go. Well, Grace, I'll tell you. See this? (*She holds up her left hand showing an engagement ring. The girls all look astonished and dismayed.*)

MARGARET. Frances, how could you?

HELEN. It's awful!

LAURA. But I thought you said—

FRANCES (*demurely*). Well, you see, last night while the rest of you were getting all filled up with inspiration at the lecture, I—I was making the same decision that you did: to give up the society of men and undertake a mission.

EMMA. But I don't understand—

FRANCES. You will. It's the kind of mission that you find in every new home. Maybe it isn't as noble as the rest of yours—giving up the society of men to sort of concentrate on the needs of one man. The one man is Bobby.

HELEN *and* LAURA (*falling into chairs*). Bobby engaged! (*Both faint.*)

MARGARET. Oh, this is terrible! We can't lose our precious Bobby! (*Reels into a chair and faints.*)

GRACE (*throwing up her arms*). Oh, fickle man! (*Succumbs on lounge.*)

EMMA (*feebly*). Would that I could be wrapped in the cool ocean wave, like some of my poor fishermen, and forget it all! (*Totters to other end of sofa and faints.*)

MRS. KELLOGG (*rushing from chairs to sofa*). Oh, quick! Water! They have fainted. Who would have dreamed that the news of Bobby's engagement could prove so crushing?

FRANCES (*sarcastically, grabbing vase from table, pulls out flowers and sprinkles each girl generously as she passes*). Oh, no! How could that matter to such noble souls? They are only deeply impressed with the perfect uselessness of men.

CURTAIN

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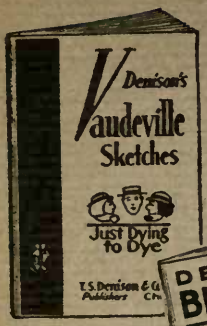

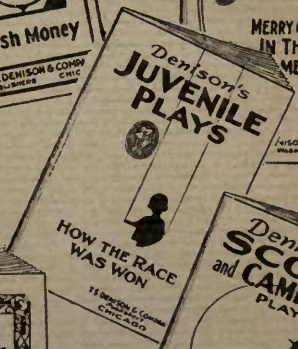

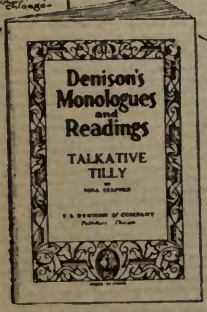

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